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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001455

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SUBJECT: FRENCH VISIT OF POLISH PRESIDENT, FEBRUARY 24, 2006

REF: WARSAW 312

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Chirac and Prime Minister de Villepin received Polish President Lech Kaczynski on February 24 for his first visit to France since taking office. Chirac and Kaczynski discussed the future of the Weimar Triangle and the European constitutional treaty, and Chirac told Kaczynski that France prefers to handle European energy security in the context of the EU (in contrast to the plan (reftel), presented by Polish PM Marcinkiewicz, to do so in combination with NATO). The two sides will meet again April 3, when Marcinkiewicz comes to Paris to meet with Villepin; later in the spring, when the second intergovernmental conference will occur in Poland; and at an as-yet undetermined date in Germany for the Weimar Triangle, which this year will be at head-of-state level. The French MFA characterized the current utility of the Weimar Triangle as a vehicle to "channel" the Poles on Ukraine (i.e., to rein in their promises to Ukraine of eventual EU membership) and believes that France will "have" to do something to allow at least some Polish workers to come work in France, a subject to be tackled further during Marcinkiewicz's April visit. Kaczynski also met with former president Valery Giscard d'Estaing and former foreign minister Hubert Vedrine before heading back to Warsaw the same evening. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) In an interview he gave to AFP before coming to Paris, Kaczynski questioned the utility of the Weimar Triangle, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Speaking of the vehicle for Franco-German-Polish dialogue, Kaczynski said he would insist to Chirac and Villepin that the group's role be clearly defined. "I am ready to accept any sort of formula," he said, "But I can not act in the name of the other Central European countries without a clear and precise mandate from those countries." In addition, the Polish president noted his frustration with the French caricature of the Poles as a nation of plumbers. Noting that Poland is also a country of lawyers, people who speak foreign languages, software engineers, and mathematicians, he said, "I would prefer that my country be known also for this."

3. (C) According to the Presidential spokesman and Vincent Muller, the MFA desk officer for Poland, the two presidents dealt mostly with European issues, leaving bilateral questions for Kaczynski to discuss with PM de Villepin. In response to Kaczynski's presentation of the draft energy policy presented by Polish PM Marcinkiewicz (ref A), Chirac told Kaczynski that energy policy should be dealt with within an EU, not a NATO, framework. (NOTE: At the January 24 ECOFIN meeting, Finance and Economy Minister Thierry Breton presented a French plan "For a Relaunch of the European Energy Policy In a Perspective of Sustainable Development," which Chirac considers to be the basis for the discussions on the topic at this month's European Council. END NOTE.) Our Polish embassy contact dryly described Chirac as "annoyed" with Kaczynski for the Polish proposal. Chirac also underlined his emphasis on the "Europe of Projects," which he sees as a way to move Europe forward during the current period of uncertainty. With regard to the future of the constitutional treaty, Chirac repeated his belief that it is essential to focus on modernizing European institutions so that they are equipped to deal with an enlarged EU.

4. (C) Turning to the meeting with PM de Villepin, Muller said that the encounter was important because "political changes" in Poland (NOTE: the coming to power of the rightist Law and Justice party, and especially its reliance on Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families) had given rise in France to a "certain unease" about the new government's intentions. Muller said that given the potential mistrust between the two governments, the French felt the need to "intensify the dialogue." Muller said that the French had noted the order in which Kaczynski had made his visits -- first "to the tomb of John Paul II," then Washington and Brussels, and finally Paris before Berlin.

5. (C) Villepin and Kaczynski discussed bilateral relations, in particular economic issues, according to Muller. Other topics were the opening of the French labor market to Polish workers, the future of the CAP, and Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Russian relations.

6. (C) On the question of access by Polish workers to the

French labor market, Muller said that the French MFA believes France "must" do something, even if it is symbolic. The problem, he said, is that the deadline for the EU-15 states to decide whether they will lift the curbs or continue them for two more years is May 1. He said, "We could do it with no problem if it were August 1, when everyone is on vacation" and the move could escape the notice of public opinion. He went on to say that he believes the two sides will come to agreement on at least some small opening during the April 3 visit of PM Marcinkiewicz, although he declined to provide specifics.

17. (C) When asked what the French made of Kaczynski's pre-visit comments questioning the utility of the Weimar Triangle, Muller said the purpose of the grouping was changing. France feels the need to "channel" Poland's outreach to Ukraine and rein in the Poles' efforts to give EU candidate status and eventual membership to Ukraine.

18. (C) COMMENT: While French and Polish authorities have found common ground on some recent issues (most notably during the December EU budget negotiations), there remain other arenas where differences remain -- from a French perspective, Poland remains too pro-NATO and pro-U.S., and its recent hold-out on agreeing to extend diminished VAT rates for certain industries and services in Western European countries infuriated the French. The French have a strategic interest in better relations with the largest of the new Central and East European states (and the EU's sixth-largest member), in part also to ensure that Germany does not develop its relations with Poland at the expense of France. France also has significant and growing commercial interests, as the largest source of foreign investment in Poland. At the same time, the French seem to have some difficulty relating to the Poles, especially to a government of the conservative, religious right. In addition, the stated French approach to the Weimar Triangle appears to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the Poles' position on Ukraine. END COMMENT

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Stapleton